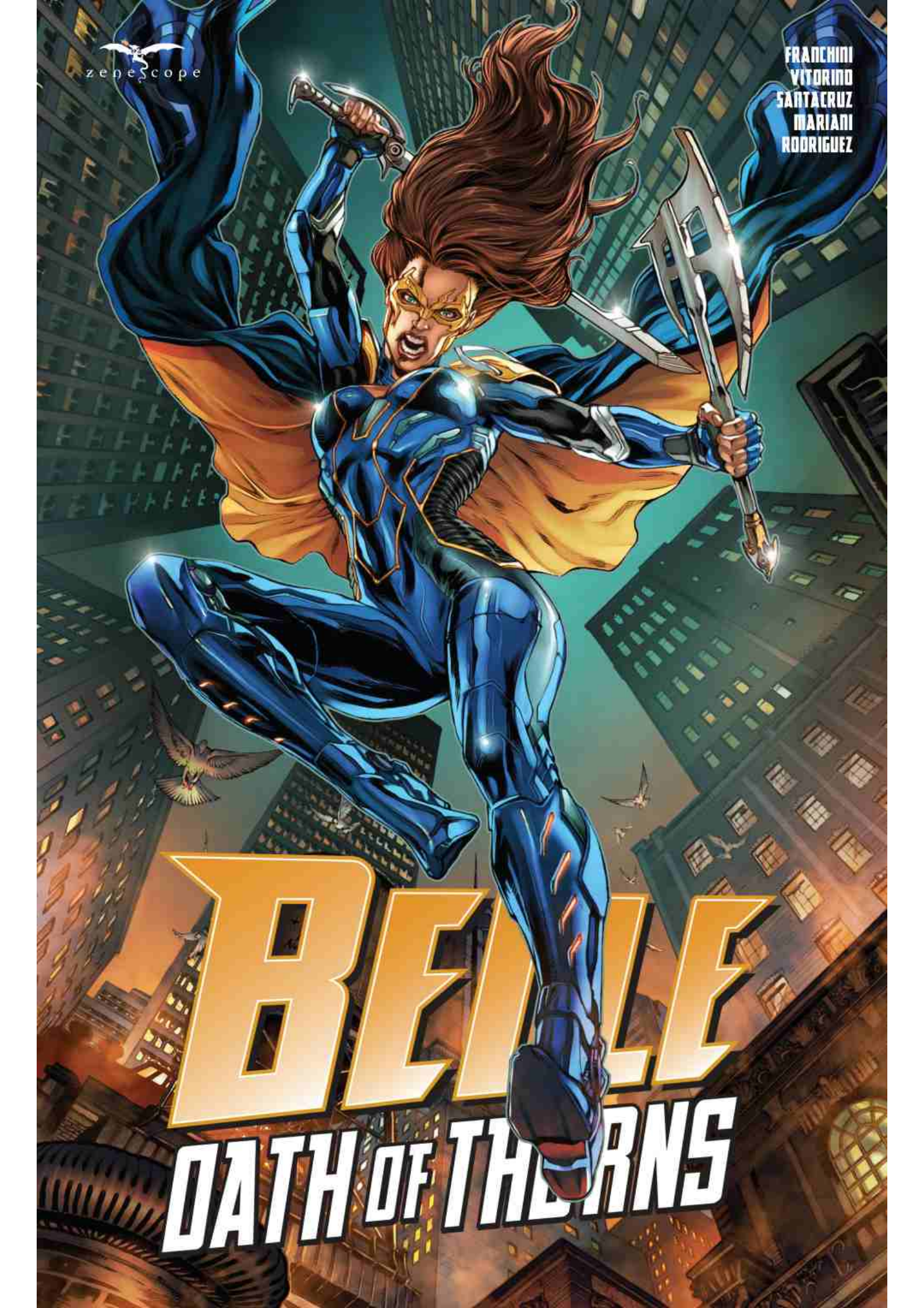




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FRANCHINI
VITORINO
SANTACRUZ
MARIANI
RODRIGUEZ



BELLE

DATH OF THE ERNS

BELLE

OATH OF THORNS





BELLE

OATH OF THORNS

Writer **DAVE FRANCHINI**

Artwork **IGOR VITORINO** CH. 1 & 3 **DERLIS SANTACRUZ** CH. 1-3

& **ALESSIO MARIANI** CH. 4-6 Inks **EDSON FERREIRA** CH. 1

Colors **JUAN MANUEL RODRIGUEZ**

Letters **HURT HATHAWAY** Editor **DAVE FRANCHINI**

Art Direction & Design **CHRISTOPHER COTE**

Cover Artwork **IGOR VITORINO & IVAN NUNES**

Grimm Universe created by **JOE BRUSHA & RALPH TEDESCO**

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Joe Brusha • President & Chief Creative Officer
Christopher Cote • Art Director
Dave Franchini • Editor
Kellie Supplee • Assistant Editor
Rachel Bishop • Assistant Editor
Ashley Vanacore • Graphic Designer

Ralph Tedesco • VP Film & Television
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THE STORY SO FAR...

Anabelle "Belle" DiMarco is a descendant of generations of beast hunters. With a sacred duty passed down from mother to daughter, she must work in the shadows to keep the world safe from threats too dangerous for society to know about. Armed with an array of weaponry, her wit, and intelligence, Belle must become that which haunts the dreams of creatures bred of nightmares themselves.

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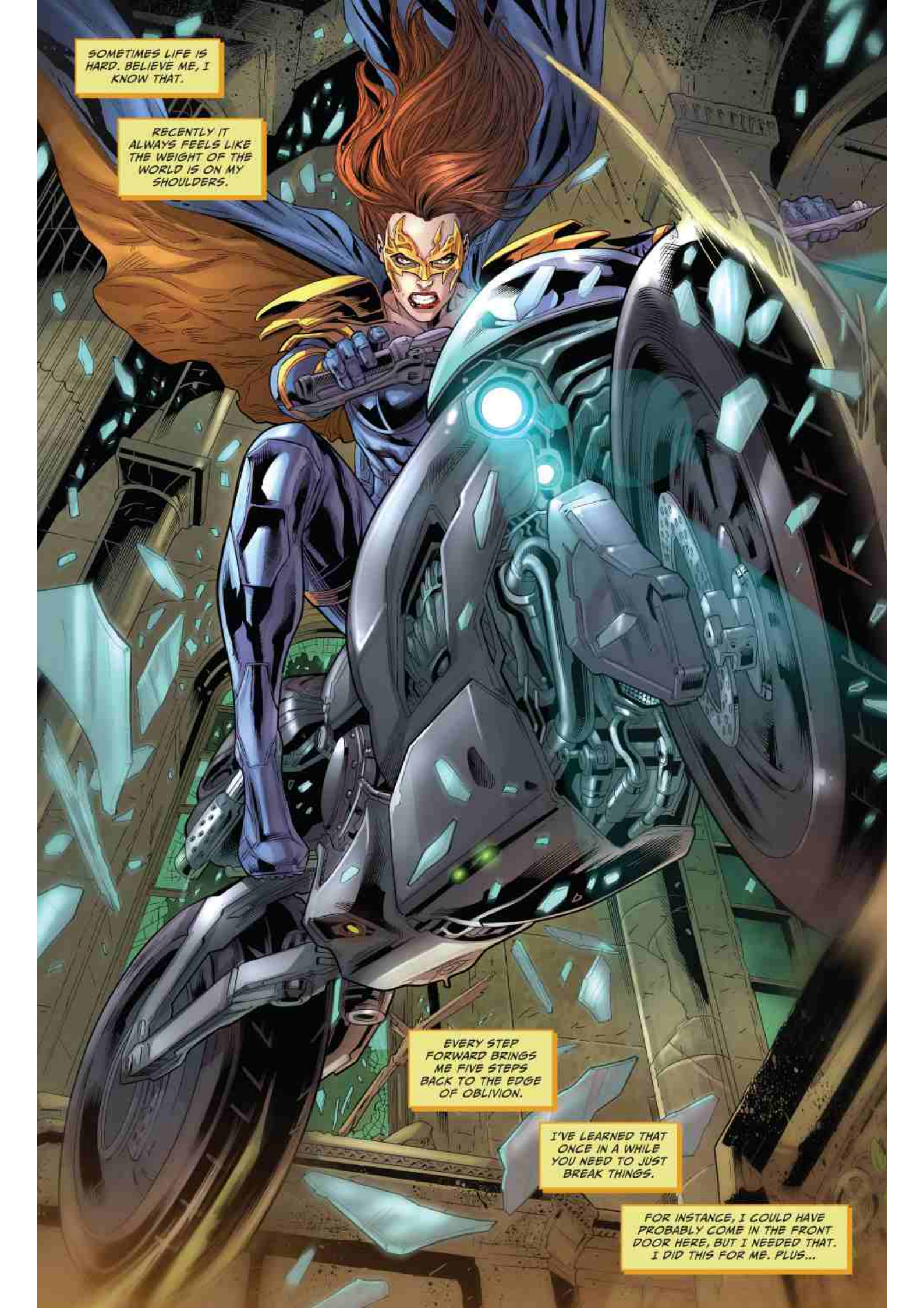
FRANCHINI
VITORINO
RODRIGUEZ
HATHAWAY

BELLE

**OATH OF
THORNS**



HARVETOLUBAO
Juan Morris



SOMETIMES LIFE IS
HARD. BELIEVE ME, I
KNOW THAT.

RECENTLY IT
ALWAYS FEELS LIKE
THE WEIGHT OF THE
WORLD IS ON MY
SHOULDERS.

EVERY STEP
FORWARD BRINGS
ME FIVE STEPS
BACK TO THE EDGE
OF OBLIVION.

I'VE LEARNED THAT
ONCE IN A WHILE
YOU NEED TO JUST
BREAK THINGS.

FOR INSTANCE, I COULD HAVE
PROBABLY COME IN THE FRONT
DOOR HERE, BUT I NEEDED THAT.
I DID THIS FOR ME. PLUS...

...IT DEFINITELY HELPS WHEN YOU SCARE THE HELL OUT OF THE ENEMY.

LEARNED THAT FROM MY DAD. HE'S IN THE AIRFORCE. WE DON'T TALK MUCH THESE DAYS.

ACTUALLY, MAKE THAT YEARS.

BUT HE HAD GOOD ADVICE. PUTTING FEAR IN THE ENEMY MESSES UP THEIR ABILITY TO PLAN...

...LEAVING THEIR ONLY OPTION TO JUST REACT...

...AND IF YOU DON'T REACT QUICK ENOUGH IN THIS LIFE...

...YOU DIE.

I'M A LITTLE OFFENDED I DIDN'T GET AN INVITE TO THE PARTY, FELLAS. BUT DON'T WORRY, I MADE ENOUGH ROOM AT THE TABLE SO I CAN GET SOME CAKE TOO.



YEAH, I ADMIT, I SHOULD PROBABLY HAVE PLANNED THIS A LITTLE BETTER.

WHICH ONE OF YOU IS THE BIRTHDAY BOY?

DON'T TELL ME IT'S THE GUY WITHOUT A HEAD. HE MIGHT HAVE SOME TROUBLE BLOWING OUT THE CANDLES.

FOCUS, BELLE. DEFINITELY DIDN'T EXPECT THIS MANY.

PLEASE... PLEASE HELP US.



THAT'S NEVER GOOD.

...OH, YOU HAVE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME.



WHY DID YOU HAVE TO INVOLVE KIDS?

WHAT'S HAPPENING? WHAT ARE YOU SEEING?

NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, VOICE IN MY HEAD. I GOT IT HANDLED, MEL.



ARE YOU SURE?

VERY.

GOOD NEWS, GUYS. AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, IT'S ALL YOUR BIRTHDAYS.

EVERYONE IS GETTING A PRESENT TODAY.

HOPE YOU LIKE TRIPS TO THE AFTERLIFE, WHICHEVER ONE YOU BELIEVE IN. NOT LIKE I CARE.

OY VEY. C'MON, FILL ME IN ON WHAT'S GOING ON.



THEY HAVE KIDS CHAINED UP HERE.

SERIOUSLY? FOR WHAT?

NO IDEA. NOT GOING TO WASTE TIME ASKING.



I'M SORRY. THEY WEREN'T ON THE INTEL WE HAD.

IT'S OKAY. JUST GIVE ME SOME IDEAS ON THE BEST WAY TO CAUSE THESE THINGS PAIN. YOU SHOULD BE SEEING WHAT I'M SEEING.

ON IT!



SO, I'M PRETTY SURE THESE THINGS ARE SATYRS.

ANYTHING SPECIAL ABOUT THEM, I MEAN, BESIDES BEING MYTHICAL CREATURES?

IT SAYS THEIR ANATOMY IS SIMILAR TO OURS, JUST LARGER. AND THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO BE PRETTY FAST.



THANKS. LET'S JUST HOPE THEY AREN'T TOO MUCH FASTER.

WE'RE GOING RADIO SILENT UNTIL I FINISH UP HERE.

OKAY, BUT I'M STILL GOING TO KEEP AN EYE ON YOU...ER, THROUGH YOU. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.



I DO.

I'M STILL GETTING USED TO MEL IN MY EAR.
IT WAS ONLY TWO WEEKS AGO THAT SHE
FOUND OUT ABOUT THIS PART OF MY LIFE.

NOW SHE'S IN FURTHER
THAN I'M
COMFORTABLE WITH.



DON'T GET ME WRONG, LIFE IS A LOT EASIER NOT
KEEPING SECRETS FROM YOUR BEST FRIEND.

BUT THIS LIFE IS
DANGEROUS. THAT'S
SOMETHING SHE FOUND
OUT FIRSTHAND.



TWO WEEKS AGO,
EVERYTHING BECAME A
LITTLE MORE COMPLICATED
IN GENERAL.



TAKING ON GUYS LIKE
THIS WAS THE NORM...



...BUT I'M
USUALLY
THE ONE
ON THE
HUNT.

THE
FIGHT WAS
BROUGHT TO
MY LITERAL
DOORSTEP,
AND HURT
SOMEONE I
CARE ABOUT.

I'M NOT OKAY
WITH THAT.



ESPECIALLY
WHEN I
FOUND OUT
THAT FIGHT
WAS
BROUGHT ON
BY MY LONG-
THOUGHT-
DEAD MOM.



YEAH, I KNOW THAT SOUNDS INSANE.
IT REALLY IS. I'M STILL TRYING TO FIGURE
OUT HOW TO MAKE SENSE OF IT, TOO.

CHOOM

CHOOM

CHOOM



THERE'S A
LOT I'M
TRYING TO
WRAP MY
HEAD
AROUND
AND DEAL
WITH...

...AND I'M
GOING
TO. VERY
SOON.



BUT RIGHT NOW, THESE PARTY ANIMALS
ARE GETTING MY FULL ATTENTION.



BECAUSE, LIKE I SAID
ABOUT FOCUS IN THIS
LINE OF WORK...



IF YOU DON'T REACT
QUICK ENOUGH YOU...

THUD

UNHH--!



SEE WHAT I MEAN? I KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

COULDN'T...
JUST...UNH...WAIT
YOUR TURN.



IT'S THAT WHOLE
PRACTICING WHAT
YOU PREACH THING
I NEED TO LEARN.

RAWR!

OH,
SCREW
THIS.



PFT



SHRP



UGH. THERE'S STILL
MORE OF YOU LEFT?

JUST
GIVE ME A
MINUTE. I'LL BE
RIGHT WITH YOU
TWO.



OR DON'T
WAIT, THAT'S
FINE.

I GUESS
PATIENCE ISN'T YOUR
STRONG SUIT.

OR INTELLIGENCE.



THAT'S A
GOOD
THING
FOR ME.

UHHH!



FOR
YOU...

SHINK



THRP

...NOT
SO
MUCH.



THAT WASN'T
SUPER VIOLENT
OR ANYTHING.

YOU
COULD HAVE
DID SOMETHING
ELSE. FED THE
TURTLE OR
SOMETHING.

HERSHEY IS WELL FED,
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
ARE YOU OKAY?

YEAH. I'M
FINE. JUST A NORMAL
DAY HERE.

WHAT
ABOUT THE
KIDS?

THAT'S A GOOD
QUESTION.



I THINK THEY'RE FINE. DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANY PHYSICAL WOUNDS.

THAT'S GOOD NEWS THEN.

BESIDES THE POTENTIAL YEARS OF PSYCHIATRIC VISITS THEY MIGHT HAVE AHEAD OF THEM.

ARE YOU GUYS OKAY OVER THERE?

YE...YES.



I REALLY HATE THAT THEY INVOLVED KIDS. WISH THERE WAS SOMETHING MORE I COULD DO.

LIKE MAKE THEM FORGET, BUT I'M NOT THE MEN IN BLACK.

SH CHNG

HANG ON. I'LL GET YOU GUYS FREE IN A SECOND.



I THINK WE ARE ALL GOOD HERE.

OKAY. LOCAL CHATTER HAS POLICE RESPONDING TO YOUR LOCATION. THEY THINK IT'S JUST A BREAK-IN, BUT YOU NEED TO CLEAN UP AND GET OUT OF THERE.

SOUNDS GOOD. I'LL START NO--



--UFF!

EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT?

YEAH. EVERYTHING'S FINE.



THANK YOU...THANK YOU FOR SAVING US.

I...IT'S NO PROBLEM. I'M SORRY YOU HAD TO GO THROUGH THIS.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

ANELSA.

ANELSA. THAT'S A PRETTY NAME. YOU REMIND ME OF SOMEONE I USED TO KNOW.

I JUST HOPE YOU DON'T TURN OUT THE SAME WAY.



THAT WAS A LONG
TIME AGO.

JOSEPH,
PLEASE RECONSIDER
THIS.



WE HAD JUST LOST MY
MOTHER. DAD COULDN'T
HANDLE IT.

YOUR
DAUGHTER JUST LOST
HER MOTHER. SHE
NEEDS HER FATHER.
THE BOY, TOO.

PLEASE,
DON'T DO THIS
TO THEM.

NONE
OF US
COULD.



LOUIS, MY WIFE WAS JUST
KILLED BY A CREATURE WITH
SNAKES FOR HAIR THAT I GREW
UP BEING TOLD WAS
MAKE-BELIEVE.

I CAN'T DEAL
WITH THAT. I'M NO GOOD
TO THEM LIKE THIS.

ESPECIALLY
NOT HERE.



I TRULY THINK MY DAD
THOUGHT HE WAS DOING
WHAT WAS RIGHT FOR
ALL OF US.

IT DOESN'T MAKE IT
ANY EASIER AND
DIDN'T MAKE ME ANY
LESS ANGRY AT HIM.

THAT DAY, MY CHILDHOOD
ENDED. NOTHING WAS THE
SAME AGAIN.



AFTER THAT,
I BECAME
OBSESSED.

I READ EVERYTHING
I COULD GET MY
HANDS ON FROM MY
MOM'S LIBRARY.



I WAS
DETERMINED
TO KNOW
WHAT TOOK
HER FROM
ME. I
NEEDED TO
KNOW.

UNCLE
LOUIS...CANDLESTICK,
HE GAVE ME MY
SPACE. HE HOPED IT
MIGHT HELP ME TO
STAY BUSY. HE ALSO
KNEW HE COULDN'T
STOP ME.



I ALMOST WISH
HE'D TRIED.

BECAUSE ONCE I
LEARNED THE NAME
OF THE BEAST THAT
KILLED HER, THERE
WAS NO GOING BACK.



MEDUSA.

A NAME THAT
HAS HAUNTED
ME EVERY
DAY SINCE.



I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND AT FIRST WHY HE LET ME FIND ALL THIS OUT FOR MYSELF. I WAS A CHILD. IT WAS A LOT TO TAKE IN.

BUT IT WOULD BE ONE OF HIS FIRST LESSONS THAT REALLY STUCK WITH ME.



LIFE IS HARD, ESPECIALLY THIS LIFE WE'RE IN.

BUT WE DO HAVE CHOICES.



WE CAN EITHER GO THROUGH IT, TAKING ALL IT THROWS AT US...

...LETTING IT CONTROL US WHEN THINGS GET ROUGH.



OR WE CAN STAND AND FIGHT BACK...

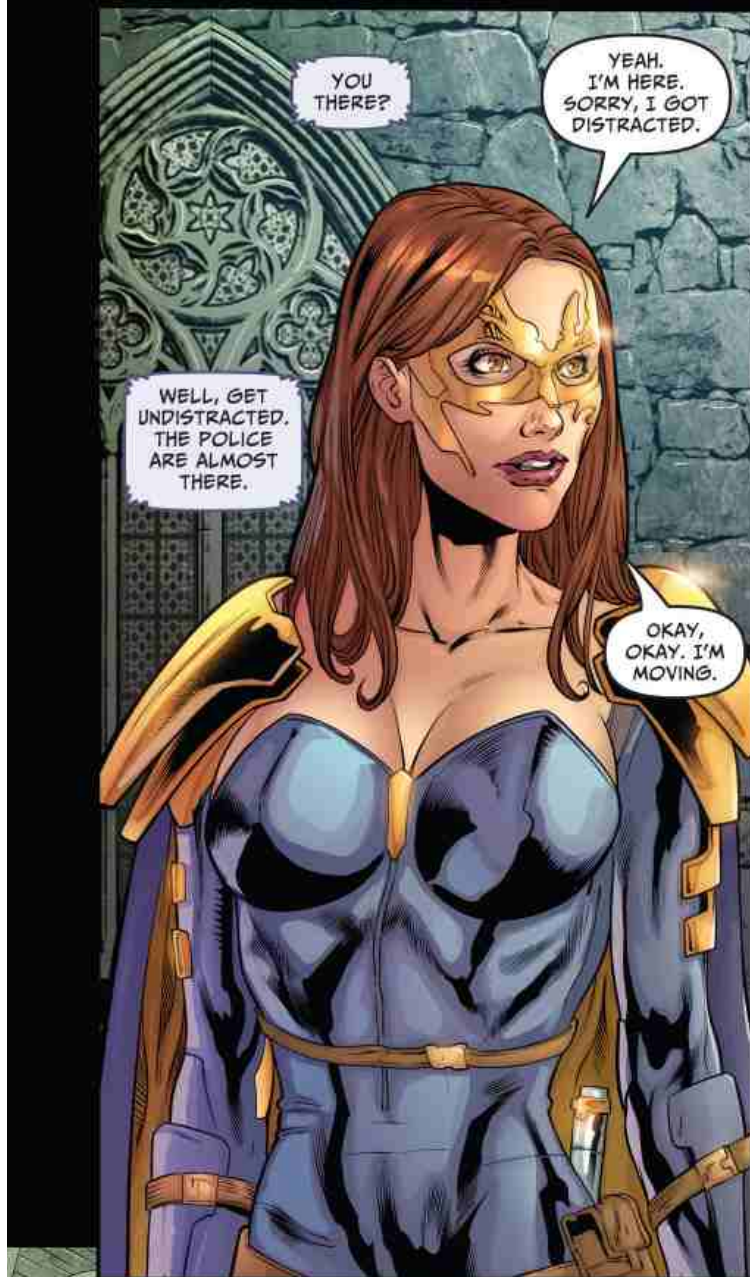


...AND LEARN TO MAKE LIFE BE WHAT WE WANT IT TO BE.

I CHOSE THE SECOND OPTION, AND I HAVEN'T--

BELLE.

EARTH TO BELLE!





THAT SHOULD BE THE LAST OF THEM.

GOOD. NOW IT'S YOUR TURN.



YEAH, YEAH. NO NEED TO BE PUSHY.

AND DON'T FORGET THE ARTIFACT.

I GOT IT. DON'T YOU WORRY.



WELL, WE DON'T WANT THE MISSION TO BE FOR NOTHING.

NO...



...IT DEFINITELY WASN'T FOR NOTHING.



I GOT YA. JUST HURRY UP AND GET BACK TO THE BASE BEFORE YOU'RE SEEN.



I'M ON MY WAY. EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE OKAY, CRAZY.



IF YOU
SAY SO.

I
DO.

OKAY. I'M BACK.
LET'S TALK WHEN I GET
HOME TO PHILLY.

SOUNDS
LIKE A PLAN TO
ME. DO ME A
FAVOR AND GET
SOME REST.



I'LL TRY.
I MAKE NO
PROMISES.

TRY IS
ALL I CAN ASK
FOR. TALK TO
YOU LATER--



OTTS! HOPE
YOU'RE HAPPY TO SEE ME.
THIS LITTLE THING WAS A LOT
HARDER TO GET A HOLD OF
THEN YOUR INTEL
SUGGESTED.

HIT A FEW
SNAGS, BUT AS YOU
CAN SEE, MISSION
ACCOMPLISHED.



YOU NEVER
CEASE TO AMAZE ME, MS.
DIMARCO. IS THAT WHAT YOU
WANTED TO HEAR?

IT
HELPS.

I THOUGHT YOU
WERE A PROFESSIONAL?
FIGURED YOU COULD USE A
LITTLE ROOM FOR
IMPROVISATION.

WHAT KIND OF
SNAGS RATTLED THE
LEGENDARY BEAST HUNTER,
IF YOU DON'T MIND ME
ASKING?



IT WASN'T OF THE BEASTLY VARIETY THAT CAUGHT ME BY SURPRISE.

THE FACT THAT THEY HAD CHILDREN HOSTAGES WAS WHAT THREW ME OFF A BIT.

CHILDREN?



YEAH. THEY WERE CHAINED UP AROUND THIS THING FOR SOME KIND OF RITUAL.

THAT'S INTERESTING. MY MEN DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING IN THE BRIEFING ABOUT CHILDREN.

WELL, IT LOOKED LIKE IT WAS ABOUT TO GO DOWN WHEN I CRASHED THE PARTY.

THANKFULLY, YOU GOT THERE WHEN YOU DID.

I KNOW. IT COULD HAVE GONE A LOT WORSE.



WHAT WERE THEY PLANNING ON DOING WITH THIS ANYWAY?



BASED ON THE SCENE YOU DESCRIBED, IT'S SAFE TO SAY THEY WERE GOING TO DRAIN THE LIFE FORCES FROM THOSE CHILDREN.



WAIT, WHAT THE HELL?

THE OBJECT IS SAID TO BE USED FOR TRANSFERRAL RITUALS.

LIFE FORCES, CURSES, SOULS, IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE ABLE TO TAKE ENERGY FROM ONE OBJECT AND PUT IT IN ANOTHER.





YOUR FAMILY MAY HAVE BEEN DOING THIS LONGER, BUT WE JUST HAVE A LOT MORE RESOURCES THAN YOU.

THAT MIGHT BE THE UNDERSTATEMENT OF THE YEAR. THIS PLACE STILL AMAZES ME EVERY TIME I SEE IT.

YES, IT IS IMPRESSIVE.

SO WHAT DO YOU ACTUALLY DO WITH ALL THE ARTIFACTS? DO YOU KEEP THEM IN SOME INDIANA JONES WAREHOUSE?



ACTUALLY, SOME OF THEM WE DO KEEP IN AN OFF-SITE WAREHOUSE, BUT MOST OF THEM WE KEEP HERE.

WE RUN TESTS ON THEM ALL. WHILE SOME OF THEM WE EVEN USE TO HELP ADVANCE OUR TECHNOLOGY.



SPEAKING OF WHICH, BELLE, I BELIEVE YOU REMEMBER BRIAN.

YEAH, HEY, HOW ARE YOU DOING?

I'M GREAT! COMMANDER OTTS, I WAS HOPING WE COULD DISCUSS THE NEW PRESSURE SUIT TECH--

YES. NOT RIGHT NOW. BUT SET ME UP A PRESENTATION AND WE CAN REVIEW IT IN THE MORNING.

OF COURSE. I'LL GET RIGHT ON IT.



AS MUCH AS I LIKE SEEING YOUR WHOLE OPERATION, I FEEL LIKE WE ARE AVOIDING THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM.

YES, I KNEW THIS WAS COMING. YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT ALEX, CORRECT?



HOW IS HE DOING? HAS THERE BEEN ANY PROGRESS AT ALL?



THERE HASN'T BEEN, BUT WE ARE TRYING.

HIS CURSE IS UNLIKE ANYTHING WE HAVE SEEN BEFORE.

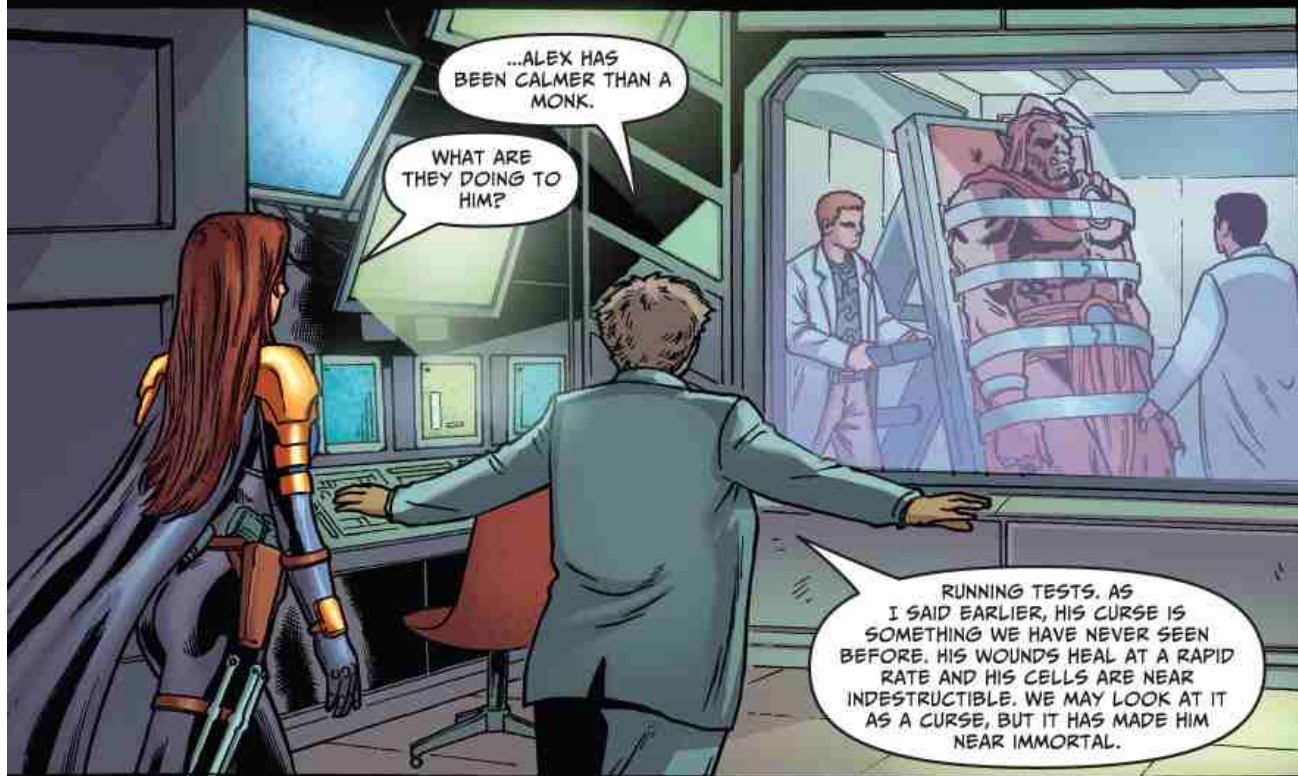


WHAT...WHAT IS THIS PLACE? WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?

IT'S OUR NEW SECURE DETAINMENT WING. SOMETHING HAS BEEN HAPPENING RECENTLY. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT, BUT OUR LIVE SPECIMENS HAVE BEGUN TO BECOME A BIT MORE UNRULY THAN USUAL. WE HAD TO MOVE THE LARGER ONES HERE.



ODDLY ENOUGH...



...ALEX HAS BEEN CALMER THAN A MONK.

WHAT ARE THEY DOING TO HIM?

RUNNING TESTS. AS I SAID EARLIER, HIS CURSE IS SOMETHING WE HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE. HIS WOUNDS HEAL AT A RAPID RATE AND HIS CELLS ARE NEAR INDESTRUCTIBLE. WE MAY LOOK AT IT AS A CURSE, BUT IT HAS MADE HIM NEAR IMMORTAL.



IT'S AS IF IT IS BONDED WITH EVERY STRAND OF HIS DNA. HIS CURSE IS AS MUCH A PART OF HIM NOW AS THE ATOMS IN HIS CELLS. THAT'S WHAT IS MAKING THIS SO DIFFICULT.

THERE HAS TO BE SOMETHING YOU CAN DO.

IF THERE IS, WE WILL FIND IT. I PROMISE YOU, OUR TOP PRIORITY IS UNDERSTANDING AND REMOVING HIS CURSE. IT COULD LEAD TO MEDICAL BREAKTHROUGHS.



YOU'RE TALKING LIKE THIS THING HAS ANY POSITIVES TO IT. IT'S EVIL AND IT'S STOLEN ALEX'S HUMANITY.

IT NEEDS TO BE REMOVED.

IT NEEDS TO BE DESTROYED.



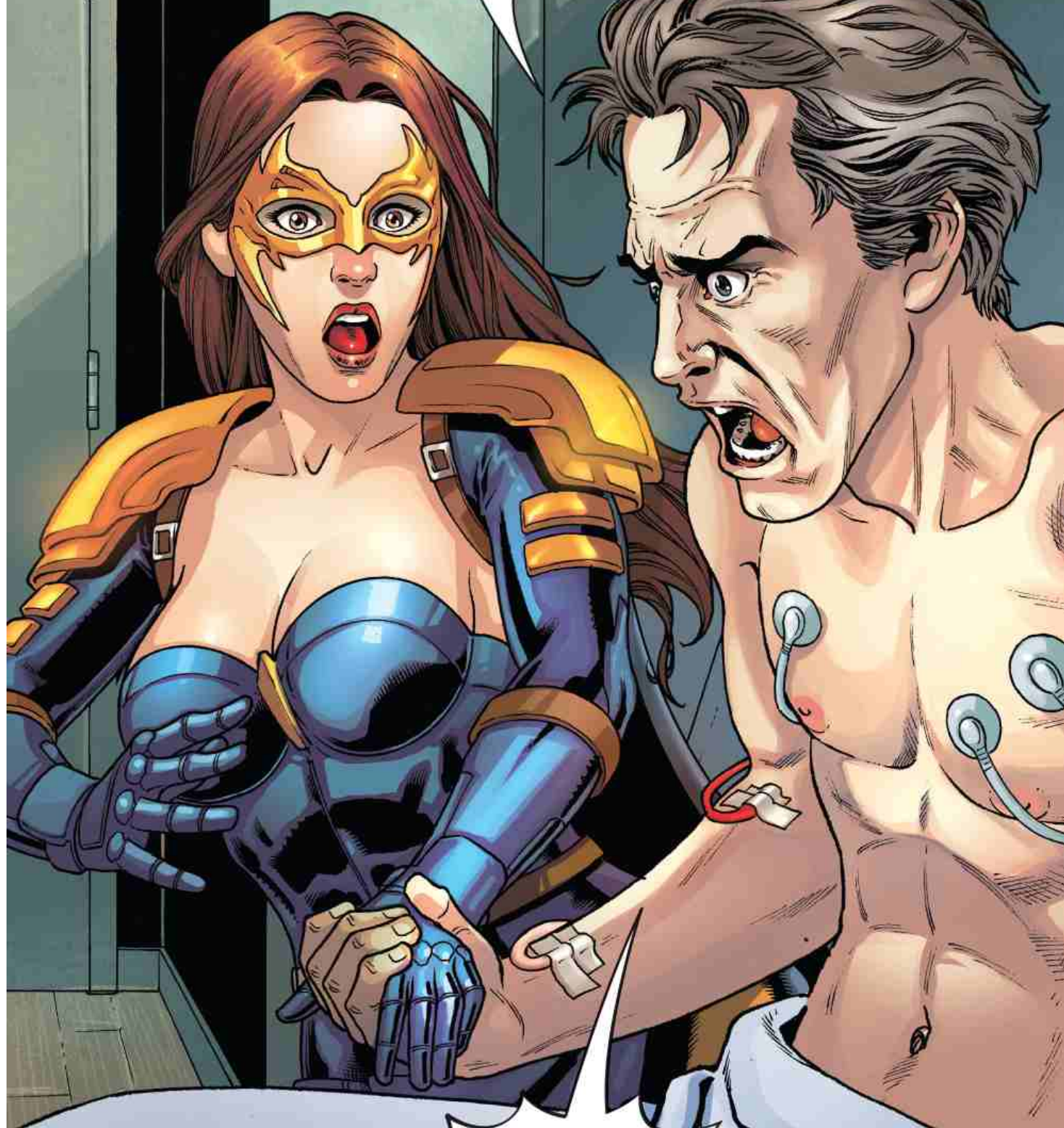


AHHH!

GET
OUT!!

GET
OUTTTT! DON'T
TRUST...DON'T
TRUST
ANYTHING!

IT'S NOT
WHAT IT
APPEARS!



**NOTHING
IS WHAT IT
APPEARS!!!!**

**TO BE
CONTINUED...**

BELLE

OATH OF THORNS